

SC-SIC 2013 Riley Award
Level One Application

of

Beck Academy Middle School
901 Woodruff Rd
Greenville, SC 29607

Principal: Jason S. Warren
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SIC Chair: J. Scott Davis
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School District of Greenville County

Case Statement

Beck Academy is located in Greenville, South Carolina, in one of the busiest commercial sections of the city where Interstates 385 and 85 intersect. We serve a diverse, primarily suburban community. At 1127 students in 2011-2012, our school's population consisted of 56% Caucasian, 29% African-American, 7% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 2% American Indian. Our school's poverty index was 44.64% and the number of students receiving free and reduced lunch 36%. These aspects of our population have remained relatively steady over the last four years. We are also a satellite school for students with Orthopedic, Hearing and Visual Disabilities and an International Baccalaureate magnet school with a magnet focus of International Studies.

In 2010-2011, massive budget cuts were felt across the state due in part to the passage of Act 388, and overall economic downturn in our state and across the country. Our District was forced to operate at 1995 funding levels. Beck Academy felt their share of economic stress as well. Our student population continued to grow as the number of staff allocated to serve declined. Rising class sizes and reduced after-school and elective opportunities combined to cause concern among our stakeholders that the quality of education offered to students across the state would begin to suffer if changes were not made at the state level. During this time of unprecedented funding issues in our state, even greater concern was expressed by our community at the willingness of our legislators to take up issues such as vouchers for students receiving private education and more funding for State Charter Schools. The level of concern continued to be high in 2011-2012 as it seemed to some that public education in our state was under attack on many fronts. Our School Improvement Council decided that it was important that the voices of those seeking funding for private or charter schools were not the only voices heard in Columbia. The Council began to see a need for a way to offer an opportunity for our entire community to have an opportunity to question the direction of funding for public schools, and be able to express their concerns to those in office.

Our SIC discussed several ways to attempt to take action on these issues, and what resulted were two partnerships with other School Improvement Councils in our district. The first such partnership offered a town hall-type meeting at Beck Academy on December 6, 2011. Two of our community's House members, Bruce Bannister (R-Greenville) and Phyllis Henderson (R-Greenville) were invited to take questions from the audience, and one of our SIC parents moderated the discussion. Questions were submitted prior to the event, or at the event itself. The parents of our two main elementary school feeders and our primary high school were invited to participate in the meeting, and promotion for the event was directed by the SICs at each school. The meeting resulted in increased communication and understanding of the issues by legislators and community members. Mrs. Henderson, shortly after the meeting, spoke out in favor of fully funding the Education Accountability Act.

Our 2nd partnership for the year revolved around organizing a political debate focused on education for a Republican Primary in a race for State Senator. The debate was held on May 14, 2012, at Mauldin Middle School. This debate was organized by community members from Beck Academy and several other SICs throughout our district. It provided yet another way for parents to submit questions and hear debate among candidates about issues directly effecting public

education. The race ended with a candidate that is in favor of adequately funding public education winning his party's nomination.

I believe the response and results of our SIC's actions in 2011-2012 are worthy of consideration by the committee for the Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Scott Davis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J".

J. Scott Davis, SIC Chairperson



Beck Academy

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November 1, 2012

Attention: Riley Award Committee
S.C. School Improvement Council
USC College of Education
Wardlaw Building, Suite 001
820 Main Street
Columbia, SC 29208

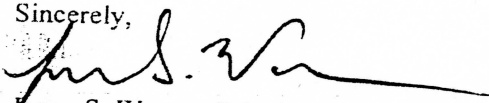
Dear Committee Members,

It is with great pride that I submit this letter of support for Beck Academy's 2011-2012 School Improvement Council as part of its Level One Application for the Riley Award for 2012-2013. As frustrations were rising throughout our state at the economic downturn creating a budget crisis for public schools, I was able to watch first hand a small group of people look for an opportunity to engage themselves and others in the political process and hopefully influence all parties to advocate for public schools. In 2010, a sitting state Senator visited Beck Academy and then met briefly after a tour with members of our SIC and students to discuss issues facing public education. During this discussion, the subject of school vouchers was brought up, and it was of interest to our parents when the Senator described the powerful lobby associated with private school vouchers. A proposed bill that would increase funding for charter schools during the middle of an unprecedented economic crisis in our state was discussed, and the Senator described charter school advocates as very vocal. These comments sparked conversations in our community and during our SIC meetings to propose ways to make the voices of those in favor of high-quality public schools heard by our governing bodies.

Two partnerships developed out of our SIC's focus on promoting advocacy for our public schools during 2011-2012. The first was proposed as a way for parents to interact with legislators that serve our community. The idea of a town hall-style meeting was proposed and was hosted at Beck Academy in December of 2011. Two State Representatives were invited to answer questions and discuss issues affecting public education. Before the meeting, both legislators toured the school and spoke with them about educational issues and then had the opportunity to follow up after the town hall meeting. I believe both Legislators recognized that emotions were high among parents. That it was not just a demand of public educators that a renewed priority be placed on our state's young people but that it was a demand from parents as well. There was also an understanding that well-informed citizens had concerns with the funding system created with the passing of Act 388, and that the Educational Accountability Act, continued to be underfunded. The 2nd partnership with several SICs organized a political debate for a Republican Senate primary and focused on educational issues. It was through the advocacy of community members on School Improvement Councils that made public education a major focus of this Senate primary race. It is my understanding that issues surrounding public education have not had a major impact on this particular Senate seat in the past.

It is my pleasure to submit our application for the SC-SIC Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence - 2013.

Sincerely,



Jason S. Warren, Principal

Magnet Academy Focus:  world school International Studies
 GREENVILLE COUNTY
SCHOOLS
Where enlightening strikes.



House of Representatives

State of South Carolina

Bruce W. Bannister

District No. 24 - Greenville County

P. O. Box 10007

Greenville, SC 29603

November 13, 2012

312-D Blatt Building
Columbia, SC 29211

Tel. (803) 734-3009

Committee:

Judiciary

Attn: Riley Award Committee
SC School Improvement Council
USC College of Education
Wardlaw Building, Suite 001
820 Main Street
Columbia, SC 29208

RE: Riley Award

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to support Beck Academy's 2011-2012 School Improvement Council as part of the Riley Award for 2012-2013. As an elective official from Greenville County, there are very few public school groups who take an active interest in the political process. Beck Academy is an exception to that rule. The parents, faculty, and members of the school improvement council identify certain things in the public school political debate that they feel very strongly about. They organize in a manner that is exceptional for a public school group. They invite all of the Greenville Delegation Members to visit the school and talk to the staff, principals, leadership, and the students.

Beck Academy school improvement council took their public awareness to the next level when they hosted different members of the general assembly at the school improvement council meetings. They became actively engaged in the political process when they hosted a debate between the senate candidates for Senate District 8.

I personally attended and spoke with the school improvement council organized by Beck Academy. I answered questions from parents and listened to their ideas and concerns about what was happening in Columbia. The process of attending the school improvement council was educational for me and it was a significant benefit to hear from a group of concerned parents on issues that really matter to them.

I also attended the senatorial debate to listen to the questions of the candidates and hear their position on public education, along with a variety of other important topics. I found each of the meetings meaningful, and while tough questions were asked, the council was mindful of everyone's time and position. The Beck Academy School Improvement Council's conduct and their engagement of public policy debate should be a model for other school improvement councils. I would recommend them highly to the committee as a candidate for the Riley Award.

Yours truly,

Bruce W. Bannister

Bruce W. Bannister
SC House District 24

BWB:lc

524 Spaulding Lake Drive
Greenville, SC 29615
November 14, 2012

SC-SIC Riley Award
S.C. School Improvement Council
USC College of Education
Wardlaw Building, Suite 001
Columbia, SC 29208

Dear Riley Award Committee Members,

I am writing this letter in support of Beck Academy's School Improvement Council's application for *The Dick and Tunky Riley Award for SIC Excellence*. Beck's SIC did an outstanding job of organizing and hosting a panel discussion with two state legislators in December of last year on public education in South Carolina. This town-hall style meeting brought together legislators, parents, teachers and community members and provided an excellent opportunity for discussion on public education issues.

The Beck SIC-hosted meeting included two of our state legislators, Representative Phyllis Henderson and Representative Bruce Bannister. The SIC invited parents, community members and SIC members from other schools to the meeting, solicited questions in advance, and also gave an opportunity for questions at the end of the meeting. The meeting was held on December 6th, 2011 in Beck Academy's Media Center and was extremely well moderated by Beck's SIC chair. The two legislators were very receptive to answering questions, and were also very interested in hearing what the attendees had to say. Representative Henderson and Representative Bannister learned how passionate public school parents are about wanting a quality education for all students in South Carolina, and how the budget cuts are hurting our schools and students. At the end of the meeting, Representative Bannister asked the attendees "What do you parents want us to do?" One answer was "Fully fund the Education Finance Act!" The next morning, Representative Henderson announced at a Greenville Chamber Legislative meeting that one of her legislative priorities would be to fully fund the EFA!!!! Outstanding job, Beck SIC!

As the PTA Legislative Representative for Riverside High School in Greer and the parent of a Beck Academy student, I know that many of our students' parents do not understand the critical funding issues affecting public education in our state, what the effects of a voucher system would be, or how vocal the charter school and homeschool parents are with our legislators. Because of the actions of Beck's SIC, parents had an excellent opportunity to learn about the funding cuts to public education, voice their concerns to their elected officials and learn how to advocate for greater support from Columbia for public education.

Sincerely,



Debbie Cotterman



Beck Academy

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Level Two Application Narrative

Two main goals for Beck Academy's SIC in 2011-2012 were to foster cooperation with other SICs in our feeder pattern and to provide opportunities for parents to understand current political issues affecting public education and to offer them opportunities to provide input. As you can see in our Level One Application, these goals were well-served. For the 2012-2013 school year, our SIC determined to continue this work in expanding understanding of issues affecting public education, and to continue to partner with other SICs in order to combine resources and better serve our communities and schools. We have worked during this current school year to meet those goals, and two specific strategies used are outlined below.

At the beginning of the year we had many parents with questions about the new federal accountability system adopted by South Carolina to replace AYP that involves assigning schools a letter grade based in part on their performance on PASS. While they were happy that Beck Academy received an A rating, there was still confusion about how the grades were determined and why a change was needed. We partnered with our main feeder high school's SIC to have a district spokesperson from our Research and Accountability Department to speak at a combined SIC meeting between the two schools. Beck Academy was the physical site chosen for the meeting. During that meeting a complete history of AYP was presented along with the new letter grades. How they are calculated for middle and high schools was discussed at length with questions coming from middle and high school parents. The meeting was well-attended by both SICs and many additional nonmember parents were in attendance.

The second session to meet these goals will be offered later in February and will involve a guest speaker, Craig Stine. Mr. Stine is associated with Public Education Partners which is a local education fund dedicated to improving student achievement in Greenville County Schools. Mr. Stine is a research associate and advocate for appropriate funding for publication. He is in demand in the Upstate to speak to groups about policy and how people can become involved in advocacy for public education. This meeting is being advertised to our entire school community as part of our SIC initiatives.

It is my pleasure to submit our application for the SC-SIC Dick and Tunky Riley Award for School Improvement Council Excellence – 2013.